

LOG LINE: Written In Stone takes the audience deep into the forests of New England, on a trip that may rewrite history; showing the real world of not-so-objective science, personal intrigue and cultural identity that surrounds ancient stone sites in the middle of a one-hundred year mystery.

WRITTEN IN STONE

by Daniel Gaucher

FULL DESCRIPTION

Prehistoric stone structures have been discovered in America. Theories of early cultures carrying advanced engineering skills across the ocean have created a rift among academics. Although it is indisputable that these structures exist, their study has become controversial, culturally loaded and generally spurned, pushing many researchers out to the edges of their disciplines.

Written In Stone follows a group of aging archaeologists, retired researchers and eccentric scientists who are considered the 'fringe.' Their organization, called the New England Antiquities Research Association (NEARA), has been at the forefront of studying ancient civilizations in America and beyond for over fifty years...often under criticism, and even hostility from their own academic peers.

NEARA's origins stem from a pre-historic site known as Mystery Hill, one of over 500 stone sites hidden in the forests of New England. Mystery Hill gained widespread popularity through an early publication titled "The Ruins of Great Ireland in New England (1946)." Amateur archeologist and author William Goodwin cited the aesthetic similarities between stone structures at Mystery Hill and those found in the monastic conclaves of ancient Ireland. His claims were unfounded, but they sparked America's interest in the young country's possible past. These flames were fanned when Bob Stone, a man of strong personality and ambition, bought the site. Stone took Mystery Hill from being an open, public area and transformed it into an attraction, renaming it "America's Stonehenge." He built a gate house and gift store and began charging admission to the site. Some say he was the first to exploit the site's rising popularity, while other note he invited and even sponsored continuing research on the site. Bob Stone banded together a group of interested amateur researchers to focus on the site, naming the organization the New England Antiquities Research Association. Soon these mysterious stone structures were getting increasing news and television coverage, with NEARA at the lead of ancient site research. The only problem: none of them were professional historians, archeologists or anthropologists. They were just interested amateurs.

Without academic validation of these finds, most of the research being done was considered sensational more than scientific. Then, Harvard professor Barry Fell shocked the academic world when he presented his theories in his book, America B.C. Fell laid out a persuasive timeline for a massive trans-oceanic migration, citing many instances of stonework found in America, but paying special attention to ancient

European languages he said were inscribed on the stones, proving the presence of early travelers. The public went wild. No one had ever imagined the reach of Western civilization during pre-history could include the exploration AND colonization of America.

However, Fell's theory of mass migration, with its waves of Phoenicians, Celts and Vikings inhabiting America quickly became an archaeological flash-point. Many of Fell's peers did not believe his claims. Soon, the argument itself became the central issue. In 1977, a conference was held to work out these differences. It soon devolved into a shouting match, as academics hurled credentials back and forth. In the end, Fell's biggest weakness was the fact he was a professor...of zoology. Confronted by his peers - archeologists, anthropologists and epigraphers - Fell was disgraced. The argument proved to be the seminal moment when academia turned away from considering ancient stone sites worthy of scientific research, making them vulnerable to future destruction and development.

While Goodwin and Fell had been huge influences on early research, both of their publications presented very euro-centric theories to explain the mysterious stone sites in New England. A new publication was about to break that mould and breath fresh air into the debate. In 1989, "Manitou" came out by researchers Jim Mavor and Byron Dix. It was the results of many years of work, mainly focusing on a large-scale stone site in Vermont called Calendar I. Mavor and Dix were the first ones to claim that these sites were made by Native Americans.

For over a century, the archeological community in New England had maintained the belief that Native Americans did not build stone structures. Mavor and Dix in their publication dispelled this myth with historical, recorded evidence that Native Americans can and DID build with stone. They argued that the structures found in New England are all that's left of a thriving, pre-colonial civilization. Any last remnants of sites considered sacred by Native Americans have tenaciously held on.

Manitou changed many people's minds, creating a fracture in NEARA as some members turned to this new line of research. Over the past two decades, many new sites have been discovered, their purpose made clearer when put into a Native American context. Natives themselves have begun to break the silence resulting from the cultural chasm created during colonial times. As modern archeologists and anthropologists have begun to pick up this research again, cooperation with and by Natives has begun to move this field of study forward, past its controversial past.

NEARA now finds itself at a crossroads. Will they be willing to make room for the Native American perspective? Many members believe not, and are forming their own organizations to pursue theories put forth by Mavor and Dix...that Native Americans can and did build these stone structures. But, questions still remain: Why are there similarities between ancient cultures located throughout the world? Could ancient cultures have traversed the oceans sharing languages and architecture? Even more astoundingly, could Native Americans have traveled extensively also, sharing their culture with other parts of the ancient world?

As the debate over who built these structures, and whether they should be preserved rages on, we may in a few short years discover there will be nothing left to debate about. In this one-hundred year argument only one thing has remained constant: with each passing year, more and more sites are destroyed proving that even things written in stone...may not last forever.